

NC 0020305 X



PAINTING

National College of Art and Design.

Title: ' More Felt Than Seen. Jackson Pollock. '



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Introduction.

I intend to explain Jackson Pollock's enormous contribution to painting, highlighting the significance of the work he produced and the thought process required to produce it. I also intend to investigate the circumstances surrounding the production of his work; when he lived, where he lived, how he lived.

I will further describe how, with great quality control, he established the reality of paint, visually allowing it to explain its own existence and in turn highlighting the uselessness of 'Image for the sake of Image' in painting.

Too Much To Say.

Pollock had known his first girlfriend Berthe Pacifico for just over a year, when his brother Charles had suggested he should return with him to New York and enroll at the Art students league. He was only eighteen years old at the time and found the decision a difficult one to make. Were it not for his girlfriend Berthe, Pollock would have had little hesitation in moving to New York. He was keen to leave the past behind him and in the end he decided to take his brother's advice.

Just prior to his brother's visit, Pollock had pulled out of Manual Arts High School, where he had found great difficulty adjusting. The three years he spent there saw him suspended twice. He received the first suspension for his involvement with the distribution of a subversive newsletter within the school and the second for striking out at a gym teacher who had questioned his ability to take part in class.

Whenever he found himself in trouble he would turn to his painting tutor Schwankovsky for advice and it was he who secured his return to the school following his second and final suspension. Schwankovsky was a tall man with long dark hair and an expressive nature, who held a great belief in modern art. He became a great source of inspiration for Pollock who adopted many of his mannerisms and grew his own hair long, so he too might look the part. While studying at Manual Arts Pollock wrote frequently to his brother Charles keeping him updated on his progress or, as was most often the case, his lack of it. When he discussed his work with him he became very self-critical in his analysis.

" my drawing i will tell you frankly is rotten it seems
to lack freedom and rhythm it is cold and lifeless.
it isn't worth the postage to send it. "

(Letter from JP to Charles Pollock, Jan. 31, 1930)

Charles understood the source of his brother's problems
and had a great tolerance for his varying and extreme moods.
To his classmates though, Pollock was little more than a
psychophant who preyed on the attention he received from
Schwankovsky.

Pollock's childhood had been badly disrupted and now in
adolescence the strain was beginning to show. It seemed
his past had finally caught up with him when he wrote to
his brother Charles.

" this so called happy part of one's life is to me a
bit of damnable hell if i could come to some conclusion
about my self and life perhaps there i could see
something to work for. my mind blazes up with some
illusion for a couple of weeks then it smoalters down
to a bit of nothing the more i read the more i think
i am thinking the darker things become. "

(Letter from JP to Charles Pollock, Jan. 31, 1930)

For the first twelve years of his life Pollock's family had
moved nine times and had him lose the company of three older
brothers and the guidance of a father in the process. He
had little chance to take in his surroundings, or to establish
a friendship with anyone apart from his brother Sandford.
His education suffered badly and as a result he was held back
a year at school. His parents marriage had been a troubled
one which eventually led to their separation. Pollock held
his parents in high esteem and had great difficulty dealing
with their separation when it finally came. He was the
youngest of five children and had grown used to the attention
he received from his mother Stella. But at the loss of her

husband she withdrew into herself and was unable to give her son the attention he needed. He had previously witnessed this same mood of melancholy in his father who, unhappy with his lot working as a citrus farmer, turned in on himself and drank heavily to escape his problems.

When entering Manual Arts Pollock isolated himself, harbouring feelings of inadequacy and rejection. He was aware of his own inadequacies, which only served to make matters worse as he struggled to keep up with the rest of the class. He looked to those whom he believed had achieved something with their lives, seeking their company as though they might somehow pass on the success. Once his brother Charles had made a name for himself at the Otis art institute, at the time one of the most prestigious art schools in the West, he became an obvious candidate for Pollock's admiration. With his success Pollock had first developed an interest in art and with Schwankovsky's encouragement it was finally cemented.

Working with two classmates, Philip Guston and Manuel Tolegian, Pollock helped convert the latter's chicken coop into a studio where the three spent many hours copying their favourite reproductions of old Masters. Pollock's work was poor in comparison with the other two and as a release from the problems the exercise caused him he turned to sculpture. Here too he had little success, though it did help to release the frustration that had built up inside him.

Though no work remains from Pollock's time at Manual Arts, a sense of direction had emerged with the interest he showed in the work of other artists such as Diego Rivera. One of the leading Mexican muralists at the time. Having seen his paintings for the first time Pollock wrote to his brothers.

" i certainly admire his work. "

(Letter from JP to his brothers. Oct. 22, 1929)

Together with his brother Charles he had gone to see 'Prometheus', a mural by the Mexican painter Jose Orozco. Impressed by what he saw his spirit lifted and with new interest and a greater understanding, his problems with Manual Arts quickly disappeared.

Perhaps the greatest indication of what was yet to come, lay in his attempt to capture the long black hair of his girlfriend Berthe Pacifico, as she hung her head across the back of a chair and swayed it from side to side. Here Pollock had freed himself from the constraints of conventional subject matter as he moved to capture the purely abstract qualities of her hair in motion. Though never allowing her to see the drawings and eventually destroying them himself, the attempt served as a clear illustration of where his true instincts lay. ie with pure abstract expressionism. With much to say and no real way of saying it, Pollock's message would always explain itself in his struggle to express it.

In Need Of Direction.

When enrolling at the Art Students League in September 1930, Pollock was given the option of choosing his own tutor. His brother Charles had studied under Thomas Hart Benton and now he would do the same. Benton was a sworn enemy of Abstract art and a staunch supporter of American scene painting. His belief that a return to the old pioneering spirit could rescue his country from the great depression, deeply offended the radicals at the time. They considered his extreme view as fascist by nature and had little hesitation in publicly stating their belief. Despite his own disinterest in politics, Pollock stood by his tutor in defence of his cause, regardless of the opposition. By taking such a stance he had succeeded in exaggerating the isolation he already felt among his peers.

By September 1930, Benton had already begun his mural for the New School of Social Research, New York. With three months left to completion he took on Pollock as his assistant, having him sweep the floors, clean brushes, mix paints and, on occasions, pose for the artist. Pollock enjoyed the role and Benton was happy to have his company. Pollock looked to his father for consent for a pursuit of a career in art and with that aim in mind he wrote to him in praise of Benton, saying

" He has lifted art from the stuffy studio into the world about him, which has a common meaning to the masses. "
(Letter from JP to his father, Feb. 3, 1933.)

At Manual Arts, Pollock had found in Schwankovsky everything he believed an artist should be. Now studying at the League, Benton filled that role for him. Though both men were poles apart by nature it was of little consequence to Pollock who was always happiest in the company of success, regardless of what shape or form it came in. As an exercise, Benton would

have his students examine the structural qualities of late Renaissance and Baroque paintings. Pollock found this to be the most enjoyable part of Benton's class and worked well in it. His liberal interpretations of the Old Masters, encouraged his tutor's belief in him as an artist of some potential. Many years later Benton would write.

" He got things out of proportion but found their essential rhythms. "

(Letter from TH Benton to FV O'Connor, 1964.)

Pollock adopted Benton's philosophy and style of painting unashamedly. His unsettled history found in those same pieces owes much to the influence to another artist, Albert Pinkham Ryder, who Pollock greatly admired. Pollock was greatly impressed by the work of the Mexican mural painters, Diego Rivera and Joe Orozco and in 'Woman' (Fig. 1) 1930-1933 much of Orozco's expressionistic qualities were evident. But this painting speaks more of Pollock than it does the Mexican and is without a doubt, along with ' Self Portrait' 1930-1933, the most successful painting from his days at the League.

The woman depicted appears both pained and frightening. Pollock has kept shoes on her feet and earrings to the side of her head and in doing so strikes a chord of familiarity in the viewer, adding an unnerving sense of presence to the piece. Naked but for the accessories mentioned, she seems further exposed in their presence, while the people around her watch on almost aimlessly as the flames engulf her body. Yet the size of the painting, measuring only 14 x 10 inches, speaks more of intimacy than it does exposure. But this is only one of many contradictions that lie within the piece, which, without reason or clear definition becomes obscure by nature, allowing for many varying interpretations, as Elizabeth Frank has explained in her book ' Pollock'.

" A number of Pollock critics have viewed the picture as a private allegory of the artists family in which the figures surrounding the woman are seen as satellites of the powerful mother, but in this, as in virtually all questions of psychological interpretation the informed viewer must draw his own conclusions. "

('Pollock'. Elizabethe Frank. Page 19)

Generally speaking, the work he produced in his time spent at the League was small in size, which highlights his lack of confidence in the use of the medium. He did experiment occasionally with the use of different materials as with 'Woman' and 'The Wagon' where he worked on the rougher side of masonite. But more often than not he worked conventionally, painting with oil on canvas or gesso board.

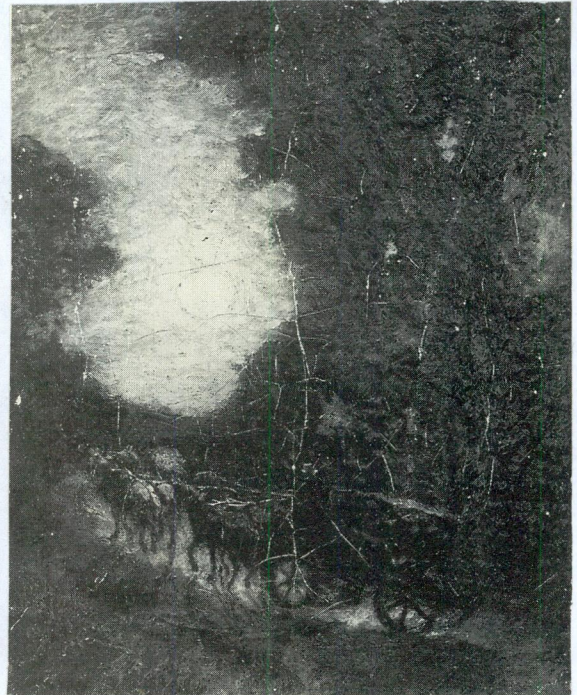
The work Pollock produced between 1930 and 1933 wandered off in various directions as he set out in search of a style of his own. As a result the work appears borrowed and disjointed and badly in need of direction. He looked to Benton more than any other as a source of inspiration, but Benton's style was never to surface as a means of expression applicable to Pollock's own set of experiences. As he grew more frustrated he turned in on himself and it was here Pollock would find the answer to his problems.



Fig. 1 Woman
Oil on smooth side of masonite.
1930-1933



The Tyrant
Oil and Tempera
1947 Orozco



Sentimental Journey
Albert Pinkham Ryder



Louisiana Rice Fields
Thomas Hart Benton
Egg Tempera with Oil/ Glaze on canvas
1928

Painting from Within.

With the Wall Street Crash in 1929, the American economy was brought to it's knees. Homelessness and unemployment reached an all time high as America sank into it's great depression. The three years Pollock spent at the League had kept him clear of the hardships many others were suffering at the time and as soon as he left it, he joined the huge list of the unemployed.

By now Pollack was living with his brother Charles again and his brother's future wife Elizabethe England at 46 East Eight Street. His brother was working at the time which left Pollock and England in each others company for most of the day. Pollock had nothing to do and spent most of the day in the apartment doing just that. England became irritated with his attitude and felt that he should be out looking for work. It wasn't long before the two began to fight and as Charles spent most of his time struggling to keep the peace, his relationship with his brother became strained.

When Benton returned from Chicago following the completion of the Indiana pavilion at the 1933 World's Fair, Pollock took the opportunity to get out of his own apartment and paid many visits to the Benton's at 10 East Eight Street. Their close proximity made it easy for Pollock to visit and the Benton's, who were glad to have his company, often invited him round for meals. In return for the kindness they showed, he took on most of their household chores and often babysat their son TP for them.

The Benton's introduced Pollock to a friend of theirs, Helen Marot. Marot was an elderly woman who, in her seventies, had taken up psychology, which she taught at a private school in Greenwich Village, New York. The school was run by her life long friend Caroline Pratt, who along with Marot took a great interest in Pollock, finding him unusually sensitive by nature.

Pratt decided to take him on as a janitor at the school, which happened to be the same school where his brother Charles worked as a part-time teacher. The work gave Pollock the opportunity to move out of his brother's apartment and into a place of his own. He was glad to have the chance and moved out almost immediately, albeit to a more run-down part of the city on West Hueston Street. Pollock's independence did not last for long though. His brother Sandford arrived in New York with the same aim as his brothers before him, of making a career out of art. Charles was unable to provide him with accommodation so he turned to his younger brother for a place to stay. Pollock allowed his brother to move in with him, but with Sandford unable to find work the two were forced to rely on government handouts in the form of the Home Relief Programme. The programme was set up by the government as an assistance scheme providing a limited amount of food and money for those living on the poverty line.

When the competition came up to design the mural for Greenwich House, New York, his brother Charles suggested that he should produce some work for it. Pollock took his advice, painting two pieces on the back of some brown wrapping paper. But Pollock was struggling to establish a style of his own and found it difficult to free himself from Benton's influence. He felt totally dissatisfied with his work and in the end, decided against entering them. Charles exhibited himself and had his work shown in an exhibition of the most successful designs. His name had been mentioned in the New York Times who reported,

" Greenwich House is exhibiting sketches submitted by Charles Pollock for a series of proposed murals. "
(New York Times. May. 1934)

With Charles always receiving the attention, Pollock's admiration for his brother soon wore thin.

Pollock was eventually transferred from the Home Relief to the work relief programme where he was given work as a stone cutter. When applying for the job Pollock had expressed an interest in sculpture and was both surprised and disappointed when he found it involved nothing more than the cleaning of public buildings. The Programme had been introduced by the government as a means of re-employing the many who were out of work. But in reality it was little more than community service work, employing people to do the most menial jobs for the smallest of pay. Pollock was unhappy working as a stone cutter which paid only sixty five cents per hour and his dissatisfaction and lack of enthusiasm for the job, soon had him demoted to a stone cutters helper.

Pollock found it difficult having to accept work as a janitor for the same school that employed his brother Charles as an art teacher and just as difficult to accept his brother's success in the Greenwich House design competition. But being demoted to a stone cutters helper was just too much for him to take. He drank heavily to escape his problems but in the end the drinking only served to make things worse. The more he drank the more aggressive he became and the more likely he was to land himself in trouble. On one occasion Pollock stopped a stranger as he walked up fifth avenue and abused him, shouting that the dog he had with him had more to eat that day than he had himself. His drunken provocation and stubborn persistence provoked the man into a violent response. Pollock was badly beaten up and spent the next few days in hospital. When the Benton's were asked to come and collect him they were shocked to discover what happened. They grew very concerned for his well being but found there was little they could do to help. Many years later Rita Benton would write.

" Jack was a very proud and sensitive young man. There was no way of giving him money. "

(Letter from Rita Benton to FV O'Connor, 1964)

By 1934, Pollock was to take part in his first public exhibition. Benton had advised him to exhibit at the Relief Show his wife Rita was organising for December of that year. The show was to take place in the basement of the Ferargil Gallery, New York and was restricted to exhibiting the work of American artists. Benton suggested he should decorate some plates for the show as they were more likely to sell than paintings. Pollock took his advice and produced several small plates for the exhibition. Along with his friend Manuel Tolegian, he helped in the preparation and running of the show. By its end he had sold everything he had produced. Rita Benton had bought the lot. With Benton himself exhibiting, the show had received wide publicity with the New York Times.

" Mrs. TH Benton Collection. One of several in which high standard is reached. "

(New York Times. Dec. 1st, 1934, p11.)

On Benton's advice again, Pollock submitted a painting for the Brooklyn Museum's Eight Biennial Exhibition of Water Colours, Pastels and Drawings of American and Foreign Artists, held in February 1935. Over a hundred artists, including Benton exhibited. Pollock's piece was titled Threshers and although it has since been lost, its title alone suggests the high probability of Benton's influence. He received no mention apart from the catalogues introduction and was unable to sell the painting. Even so, to exhibit at such a prestigious venue felt like a success in itself for Pollock, who was struggling at the time to make a name for himself.

The Bentons had gone out of their way to help Pollock as best as they could. Their home became an open house for him to come and go as he pleased. They found him exhibitions and bought from him whenever they could. Their introduction to Helen Marot helped find the work that enabled him to move into a place of his own. But the best thing that the Bentons had ever done for Pollock, was to invite him to holiday with them at their beach

house in Chilmark, Massachusetts. Pollock spent his first summer there in 1934 and enjoyed his stay immensely. The visits he made there over the next few summers marked some of the happiest times in his life.

Pollock's stays at Chilmark saw him produce many small paintings, worked in oil and water colour. They were much more successful than his earlier work, appearing less worried and much more confident in their making. In 'Seascape' 1934 (Fig. 2), two brush strokes suffice to describe the boat as it is pulled helplessly towards the rocks. The hurried strokes encourage the waves to rise up and threaten and charge the sky with atmosphere, while the small boats isolation and exposure to the elements, enhance the sense of doom that lies within the piece. The boats struggle to avoid it's fate seems wasted as it is overwhelmed by the stormy scene. The struggle described has more to do with Pollock than it has to do with Chilmark. TP's toy boat had become part of a prop, with the subject matter the vehicle through which Pollock expressed himself. It's peaceful surroundings became the arena in which Pollock did battle with the frustrations he had found in New York. Chilmark was a welcome break for Pollock, the work he produced there was an even more

By 1935, Political opinion among the American intelligensia had already begun to polarize. Benton had come in for plenty of criticism for his nationalist beliefs and persistent defence of American Scene Painting. His faith in the old pioneering spirit as an answer to America's problems, deeply offended the radicals, who saw his politics as a form of fascism and had little hesitation in publicly stating it. Benton for his part, saw the radicals as communist sympathizers who were trying to infiltrate the New York art scene in order to suit their own ends. Stuart Davis, a leading activist at the time and a sworn enemy of Benton's, described him in an article for Art Magazine as a,

" Petty opportunist..... who should have no trouble selling his wares to any fascist government. "
(Art Magazine, April 1st, 1935)

The arguments became too much for Benton to take and in the spring of 1935 he left New York to return home to his native Missouri. Pollock took his departure badly and began to drink heavily. He had grown totally dependent on the Benton's for their support and friendship and without it, he was lost. Many years later his friend Manuel Tolegian wrote to Benton.

" He was truly a lost soul. When you and Riat left New York, He took to heavy drinking, even spoke to me of suicide a number of times. "

(Letter from Manuel Tolegian to TH Benton, Aug. 21st, 1964)

Pollock had already begun to move away from Benton's influence, with the work he produced in Chilmark. But Benton's presence made it difficult for him to make a clean break and it was only in his absence that Pollock found the opportunity to establish a style of his own.



FIG. 2 SEASCAPE
Oil on canvas 1934

A Chance To Establish A Style Of His Own.

By 1935, the WPA Federal Project was introduced by the American government. The project was set up as a relief programme, employing American artists to produce work that would then be brought forward for consideration for public use. Pollock enrolled that same year along with thousands of other artists, many of whom up to this point had been living on practically nothing. The project offered the artists the security of a steady job with a good wage, paying 23 dollars per week. But there were many rules that came with the programme which the artists found difficult to comply with. One such rule required them to clock in at eight o'clock every morning on East 39th street and another, refused them permission to sign their work. The reason such rules were imposed was based on the principle that those who worked in the project were government employees and the work they produced government property. These rules were later dropped for their impracticallity, as amny artists lived on the outskirts of the city and found great difficulty getting to East 39th street to clock in; while refusing them permission to sign their own work offered them little incentive to produce work of any real quality.

When Pollock first joined the project he signed himself up for the Mural division. Here he worked in collaboration with other artists on group projects. But Pollock felt uneasy working with others and soon afterwards had himself transferred to the easel division where he could work from the privacy of his own apartment. The easel division made very few demands on the artists involved and Pollock was allowed plenty of time to meet the requirements. He was given four weeks to complete a canvas measuring 16"x20", six weeks for one 24"x36", and three weeks for a water colour. Even so, Pollock still found great difficulty getting the work in on time. He had not yet freed himself from Benton's influence

nor established a style of his own, while the frustrations he felt with his situation only served to make matters worse. With no idea where he was going his work eventually came to a standstill. Pollock was badly in need of support and once again he would be fortunate enough to receive it. This time round it came in the form of his project leader Burgoyne Diller, who had known Pollock from his days at the league. As Benton had in the past, Diller held a great deal of faith in his ability and went out of his way to help him as best as he could. Pollock turned to Diller for help and wrote him a letter asking him to come and see him. Diller obliged, and when he arrived he discovered that Pollock had produced nothing for the project. When he asked him what the trouble was, Pollock explained,

" I'm in a bog..... I can't do anything. "

(Interview with Dorothy C Miller by P Cummings, Archives of American Art, 1970)

Pollock grew dejected, having his work refused many times by the project selectors, who often asked that he re-work a piece, so as to bring it up to an acceptable standard. Diller did what he could to help, recommending improvements he might make to the work and finding him extensions on the time he was allowed to produce each piece. But Pollock needed something more liberating and when in 1936 the Mexican Mural painter Siqueiros opened up a workshop on Union square, Pollock offered his assistance. He helped out in the studio in much the same way as he had with Benton. But watching Siqueiros at work was a far more liberating experience for Pollock than Benton had ever been. Siqueiros believed it was impossible to paint a revolutionary painting without using revolutionary techniques. He used everything from household paints to industrial paints in order to obtain the required effect. He would lay his canvas on the floor and splash it with paint from a brush or pour it on directly from the can. He would then work with the image that remained, finishing the piece by air brushing with industrial spray paints. When Pollock returned to his own studio he experimented in similar materials in much the same way. At the height of his career Pollock would return to this process of painting, using it as a means of inspiration for the drip paintings he produced from 1948 onwards.

His brother Sandford had married that same year, 1936, and his wife moved in with himself and Pollock on West Huston street. Their apartment was small and Pollock found it impossible to work in it with three people living there. He took extended vacations in order to escape his problems but in the end only found himself more frustrated. He had fallen way behind in his work for the Project and had run into debt as a result. He met Becky Tarwater that same year, his first girlfriend since his days at Manual Arts. But Pollock had not got much time to enjoy her company, as her sister took ill and she had to return home to Tennessee to look after her. He had only known her a matter of months and had already asked her to marry him. When she refused he was devastated and took to drinking heavily again. Pollock had problems with the problems and it seemed he had no way out of them.

Diller soon realised just how much Pollock was suffering, he managed to obtain for him a leave of absence, which gave Pollock the summer months to himself. Pollock used the opportunity to visit the Benton's at Chilmark. The break was everything he needed and his character built up in strength while he was there. When he returned to New York after his stay at Chilmark, he was greeted with the news that Becky Tarwater had married someone else. But Pollock was unperturbed and even went as far as to write a letter of congratulation. When Benton returned to New York that Christmas to visit Pollock, he was unhappy to find that his circumstances had changed little and surprised to find that he had fallen so far behind in his work for the project. He could see Pollock had many problems and grew very concerned for his well being. He suggested that he should take another leave of absence and go sketching with him the following summer. Pollock had his heart set on the trip and was bitterly disappointed to find that when the time came he had been refused a second leave of absence. His drinking problem worsened and by June 1937 Pollock was fired from the project.

Pollock could take no more and on June 11th, within two weeks of having been fired from the project, he signed himself into Westchester Hospital, where he spent the next four months being treated for anxiety disorders. He was allowed to work at the hospital and once again he turned to sculpture as a release from the problems he had found with painting. His doctor, Edward Allen, spoke of Pollock's 'Strong creative urge' (Letter from Dr. Edward Allen to Lee Krasner, Sept. 2nd, 1963. Pollock Archive) Pollock had suffered much over the few years between 1935 and 1938 and now having left Westchester hospital he would never return to American scene painting or look again to Benton as a source of inspiration.

The work Pollock produced between 1935 and 1938 varied as frequently as his circumstances changed. Much has been made of Pollock's desire for overall composition, but perhaps too much. Overall composition is, and most often was, a priority with many artists. But for Pollock whose paintings were so emotionally, it was critical that he attained this stability in his work, as it marked the stability he was struggling to install in his life. In works such as 'The Flame' (Fig. 3) or 'Going West' (Fig. 4) it is easy to see how Pollock tries to tie up the composition by darkening the corners so as to draw the viewer into the piece. His intentions are obvious and in turn he fails to reach the desired effect. Whereas with 'Overall Composition' (Fig. 5) he had come much closer to a solution, becoming far more subtle in his use of containment. Rather than darkening the corners as he had previously done, he has decided instead to silence the colours as they move towards the edge of the canvas. The reds, yellows and whites struggle with each other for space as they come together to establish the picture plane. He installs a red line which he has edged in black, to act as a structure to the piece. The line marks approximately the first quarter of the painting length and rests behind the picture plane. By keeping it from running to either edge of the canvas, Pollock has allowed room for the other marks to manoeuvre. This is by far the most advanced work he produced at the time and highlights his ability to orchestrate a painting. This same form of orchestration can

be found in his 'Four Panel Designs' (Fig. 6) where he allows the paint to move in and around itself, as he touches on something approaching calligraphy. Pollock always worked best when he relied on his own instincts and stayed clear of conventional subject matter. His most successful work from this period between the years 1934 and 1938 which includes, 'The Four Panel Designs', 'Overall Composition', 'Composition With Figures and Banners' and his 'Composition with vertical Stripe', each reflect the freedom and composure he felt when working in this fashion. With this work Pollock had begun to show how he could vary the moods within a piece, while keeping the painting working as a whole. While works such as 'Going West' or 'The Flame' are far less successful and reflect little more than the influence of Benton and Orozco respectively. They appear worried and overworked in their make up and only serve to illustrate the frustrations he felt when painting them at that particular time.

Once Pollock had freed himself from Benton's influence, as evident in works such as 'Overall Composition', he had allowed himself the opportunity to assert his individuality and establish a style of his own.



Fig.3 The Flame
Oil on gesso board
1938-1941



Fig. 4 Going West
Oil on gesso board
15" x 20"
1940

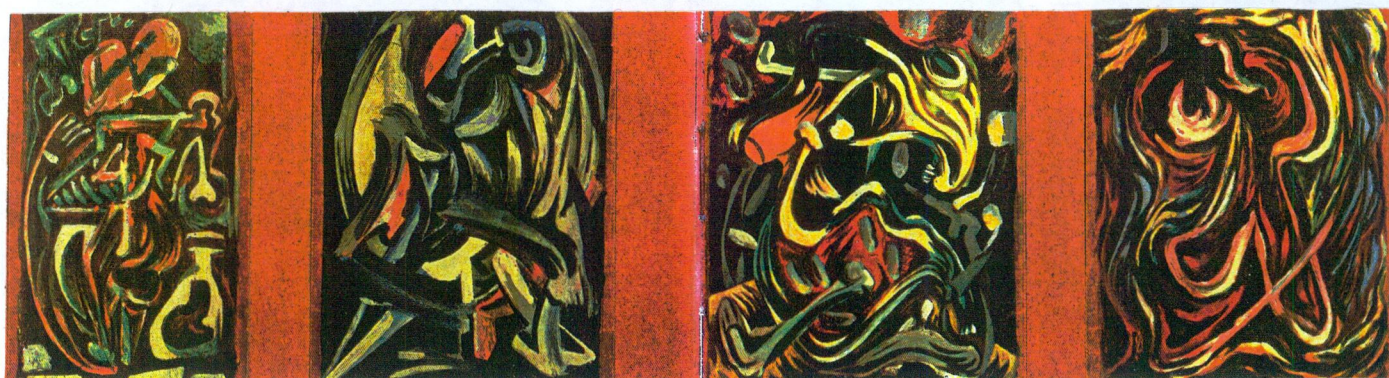


Fig. 6 Panel With Four Designs 1934- 1938
Oil on smooth side of masonite 7" x 27"



FIG. 5 Overall Composition
Oil on canvas 15 x 20 in
1934-38

Responding To The Problems

Pollock's circumstances had changed little once he left Westchester hospital and it was not long before he started drinking again. At this stage his brother Sanford had had enough and advised him to get professional help. For the next eighteen months Pollock attended the psychoterapist Joseph Henderson.

Henderson found great difficulty communicating with Pollock, finding him 'Extremely unverbale'. (BH Friedman, Jackson Pollock: Energy made Visible, p41. McGraw-Hill, 1974) Pollock decided to bring in some of his drawings so as to establish a better understanding with his therapist. Henderson was fascinated with the work and encouraged him to bring in more. For every session that followed Pollock brought in some more work, which in the end accumulated to eighty two drawings and one gouache. Henderson was a devout follower of Jung and encouraged the same faith in Pollock, who experimented in some of his theory, as Deborah Solomon points out in her biography of Pollock.

" In one of his sketches from this period he noted the four functions of consciousness as defined by Jung (Intuition, Feeling, Sensation and Thinking) and coded them according to colour

(Deborah Solomon, 'Still Struggling 1939-1941, p96: Simon & Schuster)

But Jung's theories were only one of many influences Pollock looked to as he struggled to find some sort of inspiration. Besides Jung he had looked to the surrealist doctrine and had maintained his interest in American Indian art, which he had encountered early in his life while living in Phoenix, Arizona. He had not forgotten the time he spent in Sequeiros studio and still held a great interest in the expressionistic qualities found in the work of the Mexican Mural painters. But in the end it was the work of Picasso that became his greatest source of inspiration.

By 1939, Pollock had met John Graham, at the time a leading art critic and dealer. Though a painter himself his main claim to fame would be, the first critic to discover Pollock as a great painter. When the American painter Willem de Kooning was asked many years later had Graham discovered Pollock, he replied,

" Of course he did..... Who the hell picked him? The other critics came later.....much later. "

(JT Valliere, 'de Kooning on Pollock', p603, Partisan Review 1967)

Graham had developed a cult following among artists working in New York at the time and supplied them with the latest news regarding the European avante-garde movements. He was a well read man and possessed a wide range of art literature, which he kept in his apartment. He often offered Pollock the use of his collection, but Pollock would most often decline, insisting,

" Artists shouldn't look too much at what other artists do...
An artist should do what's in himself. "

(Interview with Constance Graham Garner, July 1984)

Graham had a great interest in the work of Picasso, which he shared with Pollock. When 'Guernica' was exhibited for the first time in New York in May 1939, Pollock went to see it and was taken aback with what he saw. He analyzed the painting in great depth and made several sketches, re-interpreting the work so as to suit his own ends. When Graham had written his article on Primitive art and Picasso, Pollock did a series of drawings based on the reproductions that accompanied it. Together in 1941 Pollock and Graham went to see the work of the American Indian artists at the Museum of Modern Art, where they witnessed them demonstrating their sand painting techniques.

Between the years 1936 and 1938, New York played host to major exhibitions of important works from European artists. Pollock went to see many of these exhibitions, which included the works of Miro, Matisse, and the surrealists. But it was the work of Picasso more than any other that Pollock would look to as a

source of inspiration. His analytical studies of 'Guernica' encouraged a confidence in his own work and gave him the means to establish a style of his own. By taking on artists such as Miro and Matisse and in particular Picasso, Pollock had thrown himself into the deep end. But Pollock eventually came to terms with these artists and their work, as evident in the work he produced over this period, 1938-1942. In the past he had taken on the conflicting styles of the Mexican Mural painters along with Benton's regionalist style of painting and had still managed to come up with something that was quite individual in itself. Back then it could be found in his painting 'Woman'. Now, under the influence of the major European artists, this same individualism would manifest itself again in his painting 'Birth' (Fig. 7) 1940. Graham organized a show at McMillan Inc. East 55th street, titled 'American and French Paintings'. The exhibition gave the opportunity for a selected few of the younger American artists working in New York, to see their work hang alongside that of Picasso and Matisse. Graham had kept a list of who he considered to be the most exciting young artists working in New York and kept Pollock at the top of that list. He suggested Pollock should exhibit 'Birth' for the 1942 show and Pollock took his advice. The show was a success and all though having had little mention, just exhibiting alongside other artists such as Picasso and Matisse was enough to boost Pollock's confidence.

But it was Graham more than any other who had given Pollock the boost in confidence he so badly needed. Pollock had been relieved by the project in 1940 and stayed there until its collapse in 1943. But the early months of 1940 had seen some of his worse times to date. He had relied heavily on the support he received from Helen Marot, when things went wrong for him he would always turn to her as a last resort. She bore his worse moods between the years 1935 to 1940. When his problems had worsened to such a degree that he was beyond her help, she had put him in touch with Henderson. When Marot died in June of 1940, Pollock was devastated. He was drinking more than he ever had in the past and was badly in need of the therapy from Henderson. When Henderson left New York

that same year, Pollock became totally reliant on drink as a release for his problems and it was drink that finally led to the break up of his relationship with his friend Manuel Tolegian. Pollock stood outside his apartment one night and screamed at Tolegian to come down to him. Tolegian was slow to respond until Pollock began throwing stones, breaking windows in the process. Tolegian could take no more and ran down to the street and beat him up.

Despite the many problems, Pollock was experiencing at the time, he had still shown marked signs of progression in his work. He was not so much painting for therapy but rather painting in response, as he worked through the problems that arose.



Fig. 7 Birth
Oil on canvas
1938-1941

Establishing A Style Of His Own.

Pollock met his future wife Lee Krassner in 1942, following the show Graham had organized that year at McMillan Inc. All though totally devoted to the leading European artists and movements, she had singled out Pollock's work 'Birth' as the most exciting painting at the exhibition. Krassner knew everyone that was worth knowing within the New York art scene. She introduced herself to Pollock at the time of the show and quickly struck up a friendship, making many visits to his apartment. She thought of Pollock as a genius and spoke highly of his talent to her friends. It wasn't long before she had introduced him to everyone she knew. But rather than Pollock establishing new friends she only succeeded in losing her own. Very few of the other artists working in New York at the time could take to Pollock and Krassner soon found herself swallowed up by the same isolation that engulfed him. But she was a natural devotee who would always make the required sacrifice in order to please her hero. Which was what Pollock had become to her. She found in his work a freedom of expression that was absent in her own and both envied and admired him for this attribute. By paying homage to Benton as he had during his time at the League, Pollock had kept himself clear of the avant-garde movements of the early thirties. Unlike Pollock, Krassner had exposed herself to the modern movements looking to its leaders, in particular Hans Hoffman, as her source of inspiration. She had studied under Hoffman at the beginning of her career and maintained a great admiration for the man. Now she wanted him to meet Pollock.

Hoffman was a critic and a painter and the leading figure in Cubist doctrine in thirties New York. Krassner brought him to Pollocks apartment to see what he thought of his paintings. Hoffman was impressed with the work and suggested Pollock should join his class. But Pollock did not have the same respect for Hoffmann as Krassner had and took his suggestion as an insult rather than a compliment.

When Hoffman looked around the studio he was surprised to find no evidence of subject matter that Pollock might have used. He queried Pollock.

" Do you work from Nature ? "

To which Pollock replied angrily.

" I am Nature "

(Unpublished interview with LK by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, November 1964)

Pollock had finally realized that his greatest source of inspiration lay within himself. Krassner moved in with him soon afterwards. Her painting suffered for the move, whereas his took off.

Over the next six years between 1942 and 1948, Pollock produced some of his most exciting work. By 1942 he had familiarized with the work and doctrine of the surrealist movement. Where Picasso had offered him the power of abstract painting, the surrealists offered the subject matter. It was at this time he met the surrealist Roberto Matta and established a great friendship. Andre Breton had figureheaded the surrealist movement in Europe, but now in America, Matta was to establish a splinter group restricted to American artists. Matta held to the theory of 'Psychic Morphology', which maintained that forms and feelings are constantly changing. Matta's belief in this theory and that of 'Psychic Automatism', (the spontaneous rendering of immediate thoughts) inticed Pollock into joining his movement.

As Pollock grew in confidence, his paintings grew in size. There was a sense of urgency in his work now, which became freer and bolder in it's handling. It was also far less worried in it's appearance than his earlier work had been. He was bubbling with confidence at this stage and his work reflects the excitement he felt in doing it. In 1942 Peggy Guggenheim opened a gallery on West 57th street and had Marcel Duchamp, Alfred Barr and James Sweeney as her chief advisors. In April of that year she held an

exhibition of works in collage for which Pollock exhibited a piece. Once again his work would hang alongside the big names, such as Picasso, Braque, Ernst and Schwitters and again he would have little review, having his work cited as nice and nothing more.

In 1943 Guggenheim held an exhibition come competition for young artists working in America. Pollock submitted a work which he titled 'Painting', later re-named 'Stenographic Figure' (Fig.8) Guggenheim disliked the piece immensely and had no intentions of hanging it but for the insistence of Mondrian, who was acting as a juror. He said to Guggenheim,

"..... I have a feeling that this may be the most exciting painting that I have seen in a long, long, time. Here or in Europe. "

(Ernst, 'A Not So Still Life' p224. St. Martin's Press 1984)

The show turned out to be a huge success for Pollock. Jean Connolly reported in the nation that the painting made the jury "Starry Eyed". (Jean Connolly, 'Art', The Nation, p786, 1943) All though Pollock had not succeeded in selling the painting, he had succeeded in making a name for himself.

Guggenheim disliked Pollock and Krassner immensely. But under strong pressure from Sweeney and the fact that Pollock had been so successful in the competition, she had little alternative but to offer him a one man show. Sweeney suggested she should have Pollock paint a mural. In the end she decided to offer him a one year contract for which in return she received his entire output. He had little hesitation accepting, knowing it meant a steady income for that year. It was Sweeney again who advised that Pollock should put weighty titles on his work, such as 'Pasiphae'. Pollock was also producing smaller work at this time, where he experimented with dripping paint. He was unsure what they meant at this point and as a result they remained small in size, until 1947 when his confidence was riding high and he worked them on a much larger scale. Sweeney had written an introduction in the catalogue to

Pollocks first one man show that read,

" Pollocks talent is volcanic. It has fire. It is unpredictable... It is lavish, explosive, untidy.... What we need is more young men who paint from inner impulsion without an ear to what the critic or spectator may feel..... Painters who will risk spoiling a canvas to say something in their own way. "

(Letter from Howard Patzel to JP, no date, Catalogue Raisonne, Vol. 4 p229)

Despite such flattering comments, Pollock decided to focus instead on the one negative comment towards the end of the introduction when Sweeney wrote, 'It is true that Pollock needs self-discipline'. It was not only a foolish but an unnecessary comment to make and it provoked an even more foolish response from Pollock who, in order to prove that he could paint in a more disciplined fashion, returned to his studio to paint 'Search For A Symbol'.

The show's reviews were everything he could have asked for and more. Robert Coates had written a review for the New Yorker which read,

" At Art of This Century, there is what seems to be an authentic discovery..... The paintings of Jackson Pollock."

(R Coates. 'The Art Galleries', The New Yorker, p97, Nov. 20, 1943)

Clement Greenberg, who was little known at the time and writing for The Nation, described Pollocks work as,

" The strongest Abstract paintings I have yet seen by an American."

(CG, 'Art', The Nation p621, Nov. 27, 1943)

All though Greenberg was disappointed with Pollocks large works, he nevertheless found, '.... surprise and fulfillment in Pollocks first show'.

Pollock had spent a long time contemplating the mural Guggenheim had commissioned from him and in the end managed to finish the

painting in one night. His reputation was growing rapidly as he achieved endless acclaim. His friend Motherwell, a painter himself, had great faith in Pollocks abilities and often praised him for his talent in articles he wrote for the magazine 'Partisan Review'. Sweeney was a member of the acquisitions committee at the museum of Modern Art and wrote many articles on Pollock for 'Harper's Bazaar', illustrating them with large colour photographs of his work. He used his influence with the museum of Modern Art and finally convinced them to buy one of Pollocks works which they paid six hundred dollars for.

Guggenheim renewed Pollocks contract for the following year, 1944. Ensuring him a second one man show. Again Pollocks work was strong and this time around there was more of it. But as it turned out Greenberg was the only critic to review the show. Which was of little consequence to Pollock as Greenberg had not yet made a name for himself as an art critic. Greenberg described him as the,

" strongest painter of his generation and perhaps the greatest to appear since Miro."

(CG, 'Art', The Nation, April 7, 1945.)

By 1945 Pollock had married Krassner and was living in a farmhouse on Fireplace road, Springs, New York. Guggenheim felt obliged to look after her interest and loaned Pollock the money he needed. The house was in bad condition when they bought it and was without heating or electricity. Pollock spent the majority of that year making improvements to the house and had left himself little time to prepare for his third one man show. He managed to produce eleven new paintings, but when the time came the show opened to poor reviews and greenberg stood alone in his admiration of the work, writing

" What may at first sight seem crowded and repetitious reveals on second sight an infinity of dramatic movement and variety. One has to learn Pollock's idiom to realise it's flexibility. And it is precisely because I am , in general, still learning from Pollock that I hesitate to attempt a more thorough analysis of his art."

(CG, Art, The Nation, p445, April 13th)

This was a bold statement to come from a critic who, though not receiving the work he had anticipated, was still honest enough to acknowledge that the lack of perception might lie within himself, rather than the artist.

Pollock grew very anxious in the short time he had to prepare for his fourth and final show at the gallery. He found it difficult to work in Krassners presence and decided in the end to convert the barn into a studio. He seemed to work best under pressure and managed to prepare fifteen paintings for the exhibition. The critics had grown tired of his work by now and once again left it to Greenberg to review the show. He was positive in his criticism and encouraged Pollock in his pursuit.

" Jackson Pollock's one man show, the fourth in as many years, at Art of This Century is his best since his first one and signals what may be a major step in his development."

(CG, Art, The Nation, Feb. 1st, 1947, p137)

Greenberg spoke frankly in his review of Pollock's work and the progress he felt he was making. But the same honesty added doubt as to the validity of Pollock's work, when in the same article Greenberg described how he felt that,

".... Pollock paints a way beyond the easel, beyond the mobile framed picture, to the mural, perhaps----- or perhaps not. I cannot tell."

Greenberg later made sense of this indecision when formulating his theory on the death of the easel, where he took Pollock as a figure head of that which freed Modern Art from its subservience to the Cubist tradition. He found this in Pollocks departure from the easel picture to the mural which others such as the Mexican muralists had done before him. Pollock produced many works between 1942 and 1947. Each brilliantly attained and passionate with struggle. He threw himself into his work and in doing so conveyed a tremendous sense of presence in the paintings produced.

The scattered images found in these works are drowned out by the marks that went into making them. They carry themselves and need no explanation, but supply plenty of it. By working in this fashion Pollock was always going to highlight his talent or lack of it. As it turned out, they revealed his overwhelming capacity to paint. To take any one painting from this period and discuss it at length would only serve to have the remainder more obvious in their absence. They are each worthy pieces in themselves and it makes it difficult to single out one without doing it at the expense of another. But by way of example, it is worth noting the success of one painting in particular, 'Male and Female' (Fig. 9) 1942. Here Pollock allows each mark he has made exist in its own right without interfering with the overall composition. In doing so he creates room for a variety of readings. The Male and Female describe stand parallel to each other and tilt slightly to the left of the canvas. The diagonal formed moves slowly and allows for a moments contemplation in the piece, while the Male figure to the right, openly calculates the situation using the numbers and signs that run along its front. It is precisely this calculation, at work with the females flirtatious eyes that stimulates the event that surrounds them. The fireworks that occur are marked with a variety of strokes. He has used whatever means were available to describe the event as it takes place, scumbling, brushing dripping and scraping in order to attain the desired effect. The image becomes the vehicle through which the marks that go into its creation, become an event in themselves and in doing so describe something that lies beyond the painting and that something is Jackson Pollock himself. Whereas with 'Totem Lesson 2' (FIG. 10) Pollock describes another side to his character, as the movement shown is slowed down to such a degree its presence can barely be read. The shapes and forms he used appear suspended in some form of palpable motion.

Pollock's moods often varied from one extreme to another. For every high Pollock found, he would have an equal low. The work produced during this period, between the years 1942 to 1947 reflect this swing in mood and saw him turn to others for want of explanation. He had looked to the automatism that came with the surrealist doctrine and took on Picasso's forms with the

shallow depth of Cubism. He looked to Miro for his sincerity and simplification and to Orozco for his passion while his orchestration owed much to Matisse. He had taken in just about everything they had to offer and used it to suit his own ends.

By now Pollock was on the verge of establishing a means of expression which would not only enact some of his deepest feelings, but go further to express the art of communications itself.



Fig. 8 Stenographic Figure.
1942



Fig. 9

Male and Female 1942
Mixed media.



Fig. 10. Totem Lesson 2 1945
Oil on canvas. 72" x 60"

The Art Of Communication.

By 1945 the second world war had reached its end. Pollock had been fortunate enough to avoid the draft and remained in Americaa throughout the duration. When his psychoterapist, Joseph Henderson left New York in 1941 he referred Pollock to Dr. Violet de Lazzlo for further treatment and it was her letter to the draft board that had Pollock classified as 4f, which made him unfit to go to war. She wrote,

" I have found (Pollock) to be a shut-in and inarticulate personality of good intelligence, but with a great deal of emotional instability who finds it difficult to form or maintain any kind of relationship."

(DR. de Lazzlo, to the Examining Medical Office, May 3rd, 1941)

When Pollock truely began to paint from 1942 onwards this emotional instability lay at the source of his creation and the inarticulate personality found was visually explained and erased in the same process.

By 1945 the New York art scene had changed completely. The leading figures of the avant-garde had returned to Europe and had brought many of their buyers interests with them. By 1947 the lull in the art market convinced Peggy Guggenheim to return to Europe herself and 'Art of This Century' ceased to exist. At the time there were only a handful of other galleries who were willing to exhibit the work of American avant-garde artists. But as soon as Guggenheim closed, Betty Parsons opened. And all though unwilling at first she agreed to take on Pollock. He had given himself a bad name with the other gallery owners over his frequent drunken outbursts and none of them were willing to take him on. On one occasion he had walked into Kootz gallery, which was only across the road from Guggenheims, and drunkenly declared,

" I'm better than all the fucking painters on these walls."
(Interview with Joyce Kootz, 1985)

By 1948 Parsons gallery became the centre stage of the New York art scene. Other artists to exhibit there along with Pollock included the painters Rothko, Still and Newman. Together they would eventually become the figureheads of what was later to become known as the Abstract Expressionists movement. Though their aims often varied, this was of little interest to the critics of the time, who found it easier to speak of them under one heading. Many of the other artists involved with Parsons resented the attention Pollock received and felt it was at their expense. Rothko had expressed this resentment when he wrote to Newman describing Pollock as a ,

" self-contained and sustained advertising concern."
(Letter from Rothko to Newman, June 24, 1947, Newman Papers, Archives of American Art.)

But there were others who stood by Pollock, regardless of his success and in his response to Rothko's letter, Newman explained in Pollock's defence,

" Jack doesn't need anyone to help him paint his pictures."
(Interview with Annalee Newman, Oct' 1984.)

Within three months of having joined the gallery, Pollock prepared for his one man show there. He produced seventeen new paintings and exhibited his 'Drip' paintings for the first time. There was little or no response from the better known critics and collectors of the time and once again the task of reviewing the show was left to Greenberg. At this stage Greenberg was looking to his own career as a critic and began to use Pollock as a means to suit his own ends. When he reviewed the 1948 show he said,

" Since Mondrian no one had driven the easel picture so far from itself; but this is not all together Pollock's doing."
(CG. Art. The Nation, p108, Jan. 24th, 1948)

Greenberg's interest in Pollock now lay in the promotion of his own theory on the death of the easel picture. He went on to say in the same review of Jan. 24th,

" In this day and age the art of painting increasingly rejects the easel and yearns for the wall. "

Pollock only managed to sell one painting from the show, which left him with great financial problems. Parsons grew concerned over how this might affect his work and wrote to Guggenheim expressing her worry as to,

" The terrible financial condition of the Pollocks."
(Letter from B Parsons to P Guggenheim, Feb. 26th 1947)

He found great difficulty selling his work in America, but at the same time his reputation was growing abroad. Six of his paintings were exhibited at the most prestigious European art fair, the Venice Biennial in 1948. His international debut was a tremendous success and saw him hailed in Europe as the best of the American painters. The work of the Abstract Expressionists stirred up much debate among the critics and encouraged Life magazine to respond. They decided to consult the opinion of fifteen leading cultural figures and asked them to evaluate the work of the 'Young American Extremeists'. Pollock's painting 'Cathedral' had been submitted and came in for a lot of abuse from the critics. But he was little disturbed by their response and had already begun to prepare for his next show at the Parsons gallery. His confidence was riding high after the praise he had received following the exhibition of his work in Venice. He stopped drinking in preparation for his next show and produced many paintings nine of which sold, with the museum of modern art buying a second painting from him. By this stage he had totally removed himself from conventional subject matter and began to number his paintings rather than titling them. The museums purchase of his painting No. 4 helped contribute to his already growing reputation. His second show received the attention of all the major critics

who by now were compelled to write about his work. Greenberg believed there was no other painting to compare to No. 1 (Fig. 11), describing it as having quieted any doubts that he may have felt. Though many of the other critics were far less complimentary in their criticism than Greenberg, there were some, in particular Sam Hunter, who when writing for the New York Times had described the significance of Pollocks approach to painting as, reflecting

" an advanced state of the disintegration of modern painting. But it is disintegration with a possibly liberating and cathartic effect and informed by a highly individual rhythm. " (S Hunter. 'Among the Shows'. New York Times, Jan. 30, 1949)

Remove the word 'possibly' from Hunter's statement and it would read as one of the most accurate and enlightening descriptions of Pollocks work and its significance to the act of painting as a means of expression.

In 1949 Life magazine approached Pollock in search of an interview. He agreed and as soon as the article was published he had become a household name throughout America. The headline read,

" Jackson Pollock.... Is he the greatest living painter in the United States ? " (Life. Aug. 8th, 1949)

He was asked in the interview who his favourite artists were and to explain the meaning of his work, but he declined to answer. When asked about hostile critics he replied,

" If they'd leave most of their stuff at home and just look at the painting, they'd have no trouble enjoying it. " (JP to Life, Time Inc. archive)

In the same year, 1949, Pollock had managed to sell one of his 'Drip' paintings to his neighbour, Alfonso Ossorio, for fifteen hundred dollars. Money had become less of a problem for him as he prepared for his third show at the Parsons gallery, for which he produced thirty four new paintings.

Aside from the New York Herald Tribune, Pollocks third show was well received. By now the professional investors had moved in and with Mrs John D Rockefeller the third buying one of his paintings, his reputation of being the best painter in America had been secured. Life described him as the,

" Shining new phenomenon of American art. "
(Life. Aug. 8th, 1949)

Now following the success of his third show at the Parsons gallery it seemed their description had been realized. Many of the other artists working in New York at the time strongly resented the acclaim Pollock received. They turned instead to De Kooning, whom they believed to be a more worthy candidate for such honour. But if the roles were reversed and De Kooning had been the one to receive the recognition, the chances are that Pollock would have received the cult following that De Kooning had. De Kooning himself later described one of Pollocks greatest achievements, when he said,

" Every so often a painter has to destroy painting. Cezanne did it. Picasso did it with Cubism. Then Pollock did it. He busted our idea of a picture all to hell. "
(R. Blesh. Modern Art, USA: Men, Rebellion, Conquest, 1900-56)

This was a bold statement to come from De Kooning considering he had so often found himself at odds with Pollock. He often questioned Pollocks ability to think as an artist and in response to one such comment Pollock had replied,

" You know more, but I feel more. "
(J. Gruen, The Party's over now, New York: Viking, 1967)

In 1950, Hans Namuth, a photographer with Harper's Bazaar approached Pollock and asked if he would allow him to photograph him at work. Pollock agreed and by the end of that summer Namuth had produced several photographs of Pollock at work. When they were published in 1951, it gave the critics the opportunity they had been waiting for. The photographs gave

rise to the popular image of Pollock as the wild man of painting and it wasn't long before his process of painting was given a label. In 1952 Art News gave its interpretation of Pollock at work. The article described how,

" At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American artist after another as an arena in which to act."
(H. Rosenberg, 'The American Action painters' Art News Dec. 1952)

Much to his annoyance Pollock would now have his work referred to as action painting.

Namuth returned again the following year hoping this time to film Pollock at work and again Pollock obliged. Namuth lay beneath a large sheet of glass and filmed upwards as Pollock proceeded to splash and drip paint onto its surface. When Namuth had finished his work, Pollock destroyed the piece. He had been two years off drink, but following the event he felt uncomfortable with himself and turned to drink again.

The data which Pollock had obtained in the works he produced between the years 1942 and 1947 was always tainted with the remains of an image which, in the end, only served to cloud the sense that the marks themselves were making. Pollock knew that he would have to dispense with the image if he was ever to make sense of its underlying source. To develop a clearer understanding of the source, the whole process would have to be speeded up. As a means to solving this problem Pollock returned to the surrealists practise of automatic painting and adopted the approach of the Mexican muralist Sequieros in order to attain this immediate response. He laid his canvas on the floor and as Sequieros had done in the past, dripped, brushed and poured paint on to its surface. But from this point on Pollock departs from Sequieros' process of painting. Rather than looking for an image that lay within the paint, Pollock chose instead, to work with the purely abstract qualities of the rhythm that lay within it.

Pollock approached his canvas from all sides, which gave him the greater opportunity of achieving a continuity of line. It is this same continuity of line which creates the seemingly endless motion that runs through the drip paintings. Having reached this stage he then hung the painting to the wall and from this position he would finish the painting. His need to work fast and on a large scale encouraged him to use materials such as household, aluminium and industrial paints. Pollock used whatever it took in order to reach the required effect and at times pieces of glass and cigarette butts can be found in his work.

By dripping and pouring the paint on to the canvas, he managed to link the data that can be found in his earlier work. The mesh of information that lies within the drip paintings activates a visual response, that is most often frenzied by nature. Pollock threw himself into his painting and in doing so, created an overwhelming sense of presence in his work. The paintings vary in intensity from piece to piece and also vary in size. And although the paintings vary in mood, as evident when comparing the frenzy found in 'A, 1948 (Fig. 12) with the aesthetic qualities found in 'Lavender Mist' (No. 1), 1950, they are all so visually well-related that they are best understood when seen as a whole. Their common bond lies in their lines of communication which, in themselves, come together to describe the act of communication itself.

Pollock's fourth show at the Parsons gallery was badly received by the critics who, in general, questioned the meaning of such work. He became doubtful about their meaning himself and began to question his own work as he had in the past with other artists. For the following year, 1950 to 1951, he produced a series of monochromatic works, most often black in colour and more akin to drawing than painting. Though they were interesting works in themselves, they only served to act as a visual inquiry into Pollock's own work and as such, lacked the confidence displayed in the drip paintings that preceded them. This analytical process would lead him nowhere and it was only through desperate circumstances that Pollock would finally make sense of it all when he finished his painting, 'Blue Poles ', No. 11, in 1952. (Fig. 13)

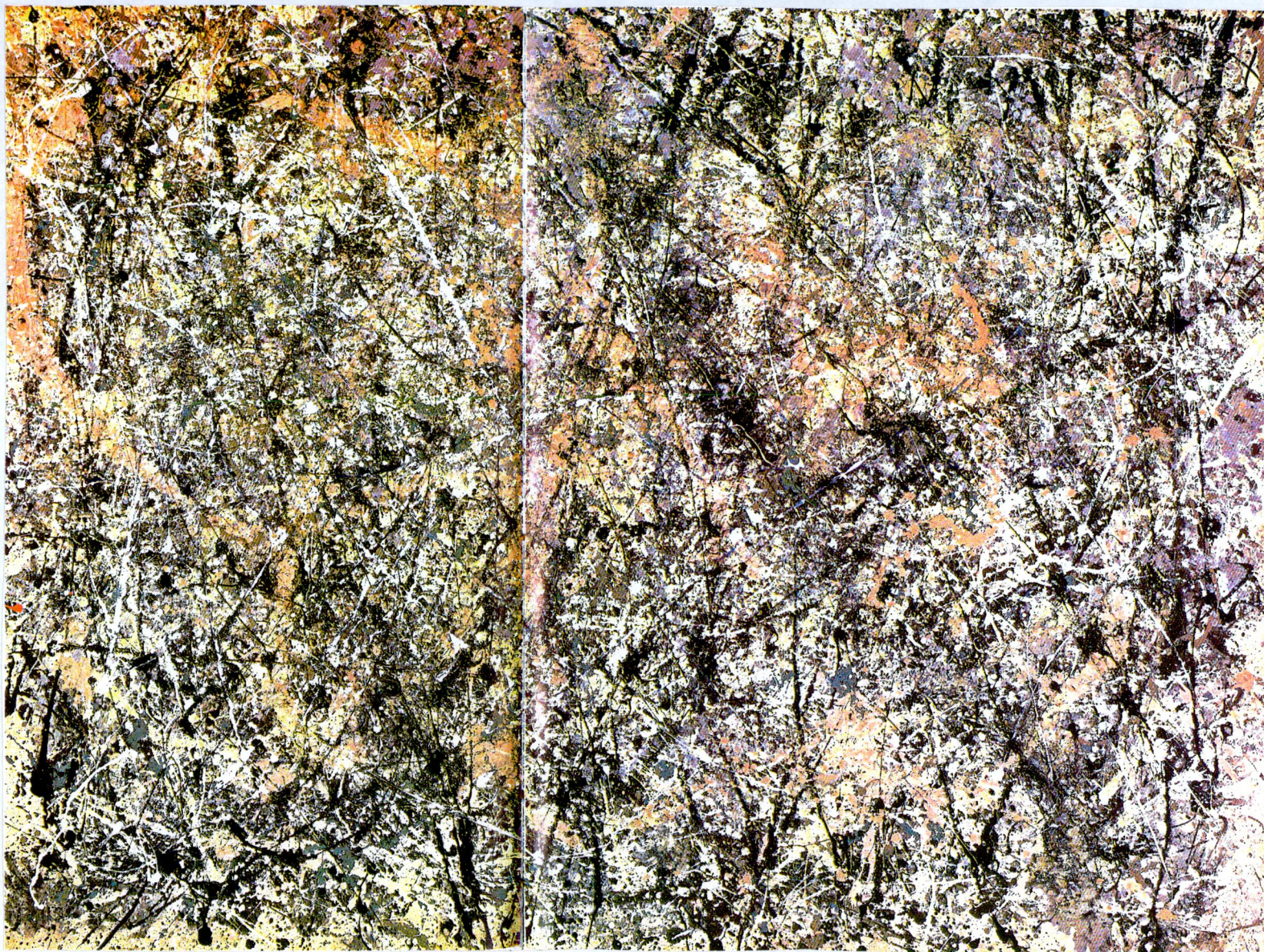


Fig. 11 Lavander Mist no.1

Oil, Enamel and Aluminum

87 in x 9 ft. 10 in 1952.



FIG. 12 1A
Mixed media 1968

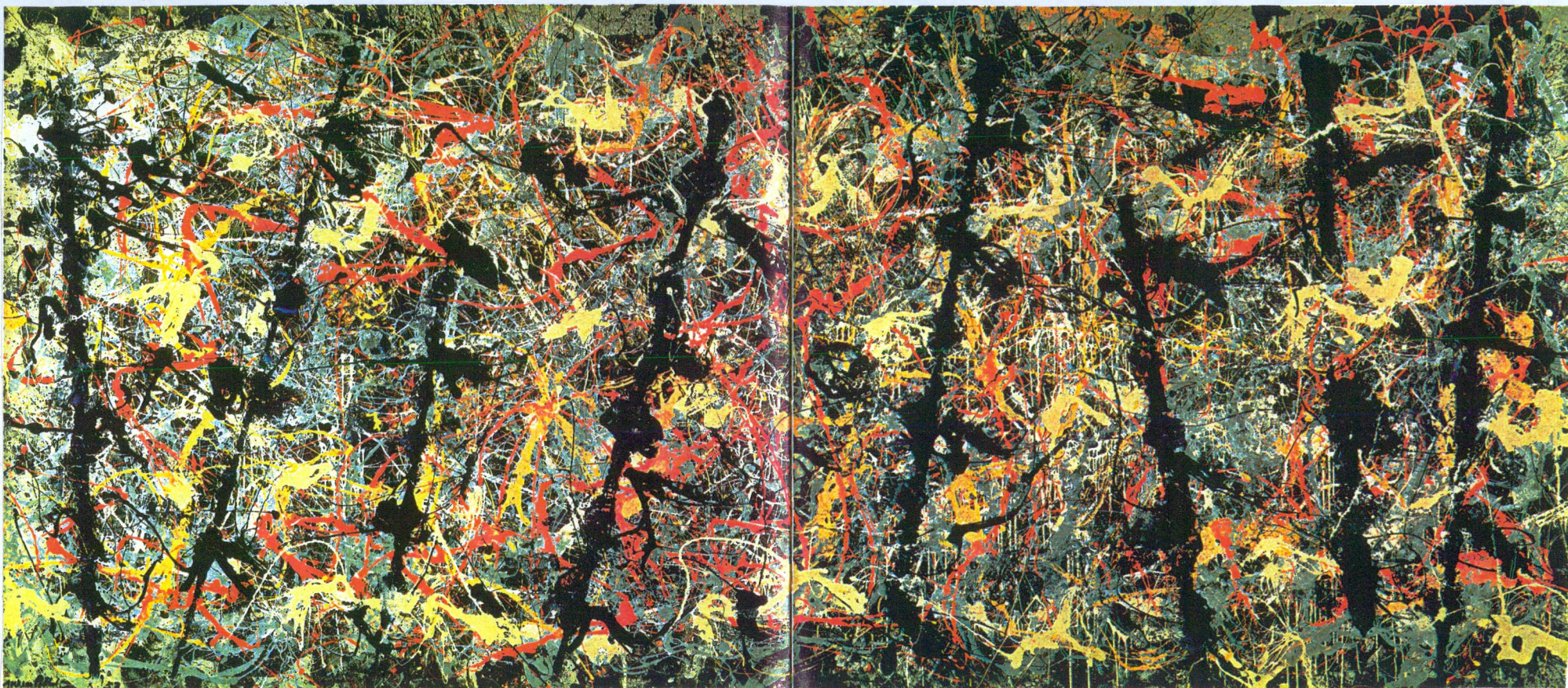


FIG. 13 Blue Poles no.11

Enamel and Aluminum Paint with glass on canvas

83 in x 16 ft. 1952.

SUMMARY

Last Stand.

Pollock had made a name for himself as the figure head of the American avant-garde and had received wide acclaim in Europe. Yet his paintings were still not selling. He blamed Parsons for not pushing his work hard enough and in 1952 he decided to leave her gallery and move across the road to the Sidney Janis gallery. That same year Pollock took part in a group show, at the museum of modern art, titled 'Fourteen Americans'. The work was poorly received by the critics who by now had become bored with the drip paintings. The review by the critic Thomas Hess best sums up the general feeling at the time when he wrote, 'The Edge is gone' (TB Hess. Art News, April, 1952). Pollock carried on producing the black paintings into the early months of 1952 but as the year wore on his problems worsened and he took to drinking heavily again. The more he drank, the more desperate he became. On one occasion he asked his friend Tony Smith to come to his studio. When Smith arrived he found Pollock drunk and holding a carving knife in his hand. A kerosene stove was alight and the flames were shooting upwards towards the roof threatening to burn down the barn. Smith had him extinguish the fire and drop the knife from his hand. He stayed with Pollock that night and together they drank their way through to the morning. Smith believed that Pollock's problems lay with his painting and that the black paintings he produced were the main source of his problems. He suggested that he should return to colour as an escape from the anxiety he felt. Pollock was quick to take Smith's advice and asked if he would collaborate on a piece with him. Smith, who was a painter himself, was keen to avail of the opportunity and together they set about painting the huge stretch of canvas that lay before them. The painting turned out to be a total disaster, with Smith later describing it as looking 'Like Vomit' (Interview with Jane Smith, widow of Tony Smith, Dec. 1984).

Though the painting was a complete failure, it convinced Pollock to return to using colour in his work. He had only three months to prepare for his 1952 show at the Sidney Janis gallery, but still managed to produce sixteen drip paintings. During that time he returned again and again to the canvas he had worked with Tony Smith. The canvas was too large for him to waste and after six weeks working on it he finally made sense of it all producing the piece titled 'Blue Poles'.(Fig.

The 1952 show opened to wide critical acclaim and was received favourably by The Nation, The New York Times, The New Yorker and the Art magazines. But again, for all the attention he had received, Pollock only managed to sell one painting. He became totally disheartened and began drinking heavily again. The work Pollock produced over the next two years lacked the impact of his earlier drip paintings and served as little more than a reminder of an event that had earlier taken place. For the last two years of his life, Pollock produced nothing. On August 11th, 1956, aged 44 years Pollock died as a result of crashing his car while under the influence of alcohol.

He had struggled for many years to establish a style of painting that would serve to describe his real life experiences. Blue Poles turned out to be Pollocks last stand as he struggled to make sense of it all. The Blue Poles are a struggle to establish the order and make sense of the chaotic dripped background which in itself reflected the chaos he found in his own life.

The drip paintings Pollock produced were not only visually exciting but possessed an overwhelming sense of presence. That presence not only reflects the life and times of Jackson Pollock but go further by allowing the paint to speak for itself. And in doing so erased the idea of paint paying homage to the image.

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